Castlemaine Naturalist

December 2012

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Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Dusky Woodswallow Photo – Noel Young

Wetlands of the Victorian Volcanic Plain

Damien Cook (Australian Eco System Consultancy – Wetland Restoration), talked about the relatively young volcanic plains (that extend across Victoria from Colac and Camperdown to Terang and Moolort and Melbourne) and the wetlands that have formed on these plains. These wetlands have been threatened over the years by agriculture, because they occur on valuable fertile land, and more recently, by urban sprawl and development and weed invasion. Through the work of people such as Damien, the value of these wetlands is at last being recognised and they have recently been nominated for protection under the Government Environment Protection Act.

Wetlands are formed when small fine particles are washed down over time forming impermeable barriers in depressions formed by volcanic explosions. These depressions can be deep or shallow, brackish, fresh or saline, permanent or intermittent and provide habitat and food for a diverse range of flora and fauna. Wetland plants can be grouped according to life forms or function. Species characteristics allow response to changes such as flooding and drying out and species that have adjusted to similar environments grow together.

Wetlands plants can be categorized as -

1 **Submerged** – e.g., *Vallisneria americana* has evolved a specialized pollination strategy. The male flowers are released under water and float to the surface. Here, they are trapped by the female flower which are supported by a long spring-like flower stalks floating on the water surface. The pollination is carried out by water movements and once fertilized the plant recoils to avoid being eaten by predators feeding on the surface. Submerged plants provide food for frogs and water-birds.

2 **Floating non attached** – e.g., Azolla - get nutrients from the water.

3 **Floating attached** – e.g., Swamp Lily, Marsh Flowers.

4 **Emergent** – reeds and rushes, usually with underground stems or tubers. When wet occurs they use an anaerobic process to produce energy to enable them to grow quickly towards light. Crakes, Rails and Reed Warblers nest in these.

5 **Mudflat colonists** – mainly annuals e.g., Old Man Weed *Centipeda cunninghamii* – "flash in the pan" plants that grow, flower and set seed quickly when conditions allow.

6 **Woody Species** – trees and shrubs – e.g., River Red Gums – "survivors" – may be 500 - 1000years old. This group is adversely affected by agricultural practices (draining, crops, embankment, irrigation) that prevent natural inundation events.

Damien talked about some of the wetlands at Rabbiter's Swamp, Frogmore Swamp, Merrin Merrin Swamp, Middle Swamp, and Churnside Swamp and suggested that one of the best times to visit is when a swamp is drying up and the water has cleared. Things to look out for include Water Milfoil, Sweet Grass, Swamp Wallaby Grass, Swamp Billy Buttons, Yam Daisies, Fairy Aprons, Monkey Flowers, Marsh Flowers, Glossy Ibis, Freckled Ducks, Grey and Chestnut Teal, Egrets, Spotted Harriers, Brown Quail, Latham's Snipe and Brolgas.

Scar trees at some wetlands remind us that wetlands have important nutritional, medicinal, and cultural values for indigenous people of these volcanic plains.

Damien believes that wetland restoration is possible and very rewarding because, given the right flooding regimes etc., they do restore very quickly.

– Geraldine Harris

Notice of Annual General Meeting

February 8, 2013

Nomination forms for committee are enclosed with the newsletter.
Please give consideration to donating some of your time to assist in the running of the club

Blackwood Field Trip, 10/11/12

Rita Mills

There were only five of us who left Castlemaine for Blackwood, including Margery Cross, who doesn't let little things like age deter her from doing what she enjoys! We were met at Blackwood near the Garden of St Erth by John Davies, a local whom Richard has known for quite some time. Before lunch he guided us along a fairly level track that followed an old water race, one of scores which fed water to the workings for washing gold from the gravel in the mining days.

Along this track it was very dry, but there were still plenty of flowers to be seen, especially peas, Daisy-bushes, Dog-wood, Guinea-flowers, lots of Hop Goodenia, still a few Tall Sundews, Pomaderris, and lots of Pultenaea gunnii. We found a nice patch of Milkmaids, and identified Nodding Rice-flower, which hadn't been recorded on the list that John had with him, though there was quite a lot of it. There were a few plants of Austral Bugle and just a few Bird Orchids.

There were quite a few birds around. We'd spotted a Grey Currawong as we arrived at the outskirts of Blackwood, but on the track it was the Pied that we saw

and heard. There were a number of Grey Fantails, as well as Crimson Rosellas, Shining Bronze-Cuckoos, Fantailed Cuckoos, Superb Blue Fairy-wrens, Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos, Yellow-faced Honeyeaters, Red Wattlebirds, Kookaburras (which joined the Pied Currawongs eyeing off our lunch), Rufous Whistlers, Golden Whistler, White-throated and Red-browed Tree-creepers (we wondered about the Red-browed, but checking the bird book later convinced me that is what they were. They are certainly recorded for the area), Striated Pardalote, and lots of unidentified LBJs.

After lunch we set off down the Whipstick Track, heading down a fairly steep path. When we reached the fork, after some consideration, John offered to take Margery down the easier end of the loop track rather than risk the narrow path which we four took. On our right we had masses of ferns ascending the cliff face, on our left a steep drop to the creek. I could identify some of the ferns – Bracken, Maiden Hair, Tree-ferns - but there were many I just enjoyed. We eventually crossed the creek over a small bridge, and we were immediately in a much drier area. We kept finding treasures, like a row of Ivy-leaf Violets lit up at the edge of the path, with deep shadow behind, Bird Orchids, Love Creeper climbing amongst ferns or over tree trunks, and the cameras were constantly in use!

Richard was able to show us a most attractive pea, which was new to me, growing at the side of the path at one spot. Called Golden Tip, *Goodia lotifolia*, it has clover-like leaves, and bright yellow flowers with a touch of red.

At this point it occurred to us that we had to be over half way, and that it was later than we realized, so we decided not to turn back, but to complete the circuit, and were rewarded by finding a number of Bronze Caladenias which were also not on John's list. We eventually got back to the cars after 4½ enjoyable hours, to find Margery had left, 7 minutes before we arrived as I found out later.

This Field Trip was so full of interest - birds, trees, flowers, ferns, geology and history - that I'm finding it hard to leave any out! The following list of plants in flower might explain it a little.

Some of the bush on the Whipstick track, and carpets of native violets

Viola hederacea Ivy-leaf Violet and *Caladenia iridescens* Bronzehood Caladenia
- Photos by Noel Young

My Blackwood flowering plant list -

Acacia aculeatissima Thin-leaf Wattle, *A. melanoxylon* Blackwood, *A. verticillata* Prickly Moses, *Ajuga australis* Austral Bugle, *Billardiera cymosa* Sweet Apple-berry, *Brachyscome multifida* Cut-leaf Daisy, *Burchardia umbellata* Milkmaids, *Caladenia iridescens* Bronze Caladenia, *Calochilus robertsonii* Purplish Beard-orchid, *Cassinia aculeata* Dogwood, *Chiloglottis gunnii* Common Bird-orchid (quite a number on the last part of the walk in the afternoon), *Comesperma volubile* Love Creeper, *Coronidium scorpioides* Button Everlasting, *Craspedia variabilis* Billy Buttons, *Daviesia leptophylla* Narrow-leaf Bitter-pea, *Dianella admixta* Black-anther Flax-lily, *D. tasmanica* Tasman Flax-lily, *Dillwynia cinerascens* Grey Parrot-pea, *Drosera peltata* ssp. *auriculata* Tall Sun-dew, *Epacris impressa* Common Heath, *Geranium potentilloides* Cinquefoil Geranium, *Gonocarpus tetragynus* Common Raspwort, *Goodenia ovata* Hop Goodenia, *Grevillea alpina* Downy Grevillea, *Hibbertia fasciculata var. prostrata* Bundled Guinea-flower, *Indigofera australis* Austral Indigo, *Lomandra longifolia* Spiny Mat-rush, *L. multiflora* Many-flowered Mat-rush, *Luzula meridionalis* Common Woodrush, *Microseris lanceolata* Yam Daisy, *Olearia argophylla* Musk Daisy-bush, *O. lirata* Snowy Daisy-bush, *Olearia erubescens Moth Daisy-bush, Oxalis exilis* Shady Wood-sorrel, *Pimelea lingustrina?,* Tall Rice-flower, Mountain Rose (formerly known as *P. cilliata*, a W.A. plant. I have only known it as Nodding Riceflower), *P. axiflora* Bootlace Bush, *Platylobium montanum* ssp. *prostratum* Prostrate Flat-pea, *Poranthera microphylla* Small Poranthera, *Pomaderris aspera* Hazel Pomaderris, *Pultenaea daphnoides* Large-leaf Bush-pea, *P. gunnii* Golden Bush-pea, *Senecio sp.* Fireweed, *Tetratheca ciliata* Pink Bells, *Viola hederacea* Ivy-leaf Violet, *Wahlenbergia* sp. Bluebell.

Of Wrens and Cuckoos

Noel Young

With the overwhelming invasion of Cuckoos this spring, it is some relief to know that small bush birds are not entirely hoodwinked. It is known that in 40% of cases, Superb Fairy Wrens will detect a hatch-ling of its nemesis, the Horsefield's Bronze Cuckoo and abandon it.

A recent article in New Scientist outlines some research at Flinders University, Adelaide, which reveals how they do it. The mother wren sings a particular song while brooding, which stops when the chicks hatch. When the wren chicks beg for food, they repeat a key part of that call, but the cuckoo often has trouble with the "password", probably because it hatches too early to learn it properly.

Barrm Birrm, Riddell's Creek 9/10/12

Richard Piesse

In early October, the bush around Riddell's Creek also appears to have missed out on the usual rainfall. The one real highlight was the millions of Early Nancys.

Caladenia gracilis	Musky Caladenia
Glossodia major	Wax-lip Orchid
Pterostylis melagramma	Tall Greenhood
Burchardia umbellata	Milkmaids
Thysanotus patersonii	Twining Fringe-lily
Wurmbea dioica	Early Nancy
Dianella admixta	Black-anther Flax-lily
Luzula meridionalis	Common Woodrush
Juncus australis	Austral Rush
Grevillea alpina	Downy Grevillea
Bossiaea prostata	Creeping Bossiaea
Daviesia leptophylla	Narrow-leaf Bitter-pea
Dillwynia sericea	Showy Parrot-pea
Hardenbergia violacea	Purple Coral-pea
Kennedia prostrata	Running Postman
Olearia argophylla	Musk Daisy-bush
Cymbonotus preissianus	Austral Bear's-ears
Coronidium scorpioides	Button Everlasting
Microseris sp 3	Yam Daisy
Ozothamnus obcordatus	Grey Everlasting
Xerochrysum viscosum	Sticky Everlasting
Cassinia aculeata	Common Cassinia
Epacris impressa	Common Heath
Cryptandra amara	Bitter Cryptandra
Rhytidosporum procumbens	White Marianth
Pimelea humilis	Common Rice-flower
Stackhousia monogyna	Creamy Candles
Drosera peltata	Tall Sundew
Gonocarpus tetragynus	Common Raspwort
Tetratheca ciliata	Pink Bells
Stylidium graminifolium	Common Trigger-plant
Viola hederacea	Native Violet
Comesperma volubile	Love Creeper
Leptospermum continentale	Prickly Tea-tree
Acacia nano-dealbata	Dwarf Silver Wattle (rare in Australia)
paradoxa	Hedge Wattle
provincialis	Wirilda
verticillata	Prickly Moses

In accordance with our committee policy of referring appeals for funds to our individual members, we have received the following :

1 A general request for funds from **Birdlife** for "vital education and community engagement activities that focus on birds and their habitat"

2 **Bush Heritage** – appeal to help buy Naree Station in north-west NSW which contains unique wetlands. www.bushheritage.org.au/appeal

More details are available from the Secretary or the meeting table.

Observations

- At the Chewton Cemetery two White-winged Trillers, and a Kookaburra that shot out of a tree when Lesley sneezed! Ern Perkins
- Pairs of Ravens, Magpies, Masked Lapwings, have all had a second lot of babies this season - Lorraine Le Plastrier
- Hundreds of migratory birds are flying into Lake Victoria, near Point Lonsdale - Joy Weatherill
- While on duty at an Open Garden at Harcourt, a pair of Striated Pardalotes was observed using each end of a square section of iron that was supporting wrought iron framework as nesting sites - George Broadway
- Pardalotes are using small diameter rods for nesting at home too. Also Ravens pulling new plants right out of ground, Eastern Rosellas nesting with six eggs in a hollow log, Blue-tongued Lizards are about, and a badly mutilated Woodland or Grey's Blind-snake was found in front of the house (probably eaten by a bird of prey) - Denis Hurley
- Rufous Song Lark, Olive-backed Orioles and Sacred Kingfishers at Barkers Creek - Geoff Harris
- Magpie Geese at wetlands beyond Wallis and hundreds of Ibis at wetlands further on between Camperdown and Colac - Richard Piesse
- Where Ravens have been stealing eggs and wire has been used to deter this behaviour, research has shown that the Ravens very quickly learn that "wire" means "eggs" and are encouraged rather than deterred – Christine Kilmartin
- Birds are dropping golf balls into the garden regularly - Helen and Chris Morris
- Cup Moth larvae in Williams Street are having a noticeable affect on the Eucalypts - Lorraine Le Plastrier
- New leaves appearing on Cup Moth affected trees at Tarnagulla and Moliagal 3-4 weeks ago. Trees recovered in 1992-93 too. Magpies and Ravens eat the larvae - Rita Mills
- Two **Brolgas** flew off a dam in Boundary Rd Sandon – Rita Mills

Observations from Dennis Hurley

Oct 5: Fan-tailed Cuckoo in backyard area, 14: Beautiful badge Huntsman – Neosparassus calligaster, male, back porch, 15: Frenches Huntsman, Family Sparassidae, 17: Leaden Flycatcher – east of house; 5.30pm Whistling Kite circling over house, 20: Rural Crab Spider - Tharpyna campestrata, Family Thomaisidae, 24: Black-capped Sittella (Varied) at front gate on Grey Box. November 4: Found badly mutilated body of Gray's Blind Snake or possibly Woodland Blind Snake, in front garden. 7: Hamilton's Orb-weaver Araneus hamiltonii, female, Family Araneidae and prey near house on Round-leaf Mint-bush.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme
December 2012

Fri December 14 meeting: Members night

Members' "Show and Tell". Share a few photos, a nature experience, a poem - be as creative as you like. Slide and digital projector, laptop available for use (powerpoint or jpegs on a CD or USB key should work)

UCA Hall, 7.30 pm. Bring a plate of supper to share

Sat December 15 picnic/field trip: Location to be decided

Fri February 8: First meeting for 2013 including AGM
Speaker: NIGEL HARLAND - Birds in Brazil

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.
Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.
Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 7.30 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Subscriptions for 2012
Ordinary membership: Single $30, Family $40
Pensioner or student: Single $25, Family $30
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

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